

**Rio Grande Citizens Forum
Las Cruces City Hall
Las Cruces, NM
April 23, 2015
* Tentative Meeting Notes**

Board Members in attendance:

John Balliew, El Paso Water Utilities
Danny Chavez, Huidobro County Irrigation District
Travis Johnson, Travis Johnson Law Firm
Conrad Keyes, Jr., Paso del Norte Watershed Council
Zack Libbin, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Sal Masoud, Del Rio Engineering, Inc.
Gill Sorg, City of Las Cruces, Council
Miguel Teran, El Paso County Water Improvement District #1

International Boundary and Water Commission Staff in attendance:

Carlos Peña, Principal Engineer – Operations
Antonio Solo, Area Operations Manager – Upper Rio Grande Projects
Sally Spener, Foreign Affairs Secretary
Padinare Unnikrishna, Supervisory Civil Engineer, Engineering Services Division
Shellie Muñoz, Public Affairs Assistant

ATTENDEES:

Annabelle Johnson, Citizen
Bert Cortez, Bureau of Reclamation
Chris Canavan, New Mexico Environment Department
Cora Martinez, Hunt Institute, University of Texas at El Paso
Daniel Tirres, Bureau of Reclamation
David Morris, taxpayer
Dwayne Solana, City of Sunland Park
Earl F. Burkholder, Global Cogo, Inc.
Ed Guerrero, Bureau of Land Management – Las Cruces
Enrique Muñoz, International Boundary and Water Commission – Mexican Section
Karen Ray, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
Linda Vazquez, City of Sunland Park
Melecio Acosta, Doña Ana County Planning and Zoning Commission
Olga Pedroza, City of Las Cruces
R. Kimpel, citizen
Rene Blizzard, taxpayer
Tim Conoveloff, citizen
William Little, City of Las Cruces Utilities
Woody Irving, Bureau of Reclamation

Welcoming Remarks:

At 6:35 PM Citizens Forum Co-Chair Carlos Peña convened the meeting. He welcomed the group, and had the board members and members of the audience introduce themselves.

Mr. Peña then read the area drought conditions announcement that was handed out to all present and turned the meeting over to the first presenter, Mr. Bert Cortez.

Presentation One –Rio Grande Project Water Supply for 2015: Bert Cortez, Bureau of Reclamation

Mr. Cortez presented on the current hydrologic conditions of the Upper Rio Grande Basin which spans from Elephant Butte to the El Paso/Juarez Valleys. He provided information from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on the Rio Grande Basin Reports between March 17, 2015 and April 17, 2015 and reported that the snow water equivalent (SWE) numbers had improved since the report had been printed and the area was currently getting more snow. He presented several graphs providing information on the past and projected snow fall equivalents along with the Rio Grande Basin Water Supply Outlook Report. Additionally, he presented on the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Diagnostic Discussion stating that the ENSO Alert System Status as of March 5, 2015 is under El Niño Watch. He explained that the conditions have improved for the last month which is good. However, it doesn't really affect the current conditions for the summer but gives indication of snow pack conditions for the winter.

A report providing the Rio Grande Basin Reservoir Data as of April 20, 2015 was presented indicating the storage at the Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs is 424,845 AF (Acre Feet) for the Rio Grande Project Storage. However, Mr. Cortez explained that some of the water is set aside as Rio Grande Compact Credit Water and San Juan-Chama Water, making the actual amount of storage water for the Rio Grande Project 405,056 AF.

Mr. Cortez informed those present that based on the March through July Water Supply Outlook, it appears that 36 percent of runoff is going into the reservoirs. A graph plotting the estimated storage and releases in acre-feet of the Caballo and Elephant Butte reservoirs was presented. It indicated at what levels the reservoirs will be and when. It also showed that releases would begin from Mid-May to early June. He explained that they try to keep as much of the water in Elephant Butte since it is deeper thus minimizing the loss of water to evaporation.

The presentation provided the 2015 Rio Grande Project Operations Coordination with the projected initial allocation deliveries to canal headings as follows: EBID, May 11th (Only on Arrey Canal); EBID, June 1st (Entire District); EP#1, June 1st; Mexico, June 1st. Water allocations for April were as follows: Mexico, 22,568 KAF (Thousand Acre Feet); EBID, 115,388 KAF; and EP#1 128,176 KAF. The Rio Grande Project water allocation to users is currently 37.6% of a full supply.

To summarize, if El Niño conditions continue, the warmer water in the Pacific will equal positive precipitation conditions for the winter. Mr. Cortez concluded his presentation and the meeting was open for questions.

Question from Carlos Peña – El Niño means more precipitation?

Answer – Not during monsoon season but in the winter.

Question from Carlos Peña – The 2015 Initial Allocation dated April 1, states the allocation would be 37.6% of full, but can it improve?

Answer – No, the report is only processed once a month.

There were no additional questions from the board or the audience.

With the questions answered, Mr. Cortez' presentation was completed and the meeting was turned over to Mr. Tony Solo, United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission.

Presentation Two –Rio Grande Canalization Project Sediment Removal Operations, Mr. Tony Solo, International Boundary and Water Commission

Mr. Solo presented on the sediment removal operations of the Rio Grande Canalization Project. Mr. Solo explained that the project begins at Percha Dam in southern New Mexico and ends at American Dam in southwest Texas. He explained that maintenance of the channels is based on which need the most attention and provided a schedule of the work that has been completed in 2014 and is scheduled to be completed in 2015. Additionally, he presented aerial photos of the various arroyos detailing how much sediment in cubic yards had been removed. Photos were also presented of the arroyos prior to sediment removal and after sediment removal showing the free flowing water. Other photos of Culvert #1 in the City of Sunland Park storm drains showed the sediment conditions prior to and after removal. Mr. Solo informed those present, that Mesilla Dam will have sediment removed once authorization of a disposal site has been made. Mr. Solo concluded his presentation and the meeting was open for questions.

Question from Carlos Peña – Where is the water coming from?

Answer – The bottom of the river.

Question from Carlos Peña – What is the estimated amount of sediment removal?

Answer – Total greater than 130 thousand cubic yards.

Question from Gill Sorg – Where does the sediment go?

Answer – Asarco site and private site.

Comment from Carlos Peña – USIBWC Commissioner has commented that we may be looking at private owners and cities to help reduce amount of sediment that gets into the river.

Question from Miguel Teran – Do we think we're removing enough sediment to meet our goals?

Answer – At this point no because we don't have the personnel.

Question from John Balliew – For next season what do we see for removal?

Answer – 200 thousand cubic yards if everything goes as planned.

Comment from Carlos Peña – If we don't have the personnel we may contract. Difficulty is finding disposal sites.

Question – Is there sediment control on the Montoya Dam?

Answer – No.

Question – Are there soil classifications?

Answer – Yes, the Environmental department tests not for classification but for contamination.

Question from Miguel Teran – Regarding budgeting, it seems channel maintenance maybe wasn't done in previous years. Is there a plan for maintaining regularly?

Answer from Carlos Peña – Dredging and modeling are done working closely with stakeholders. We're balancing stakeholders' concerns.

Question – Is there a schedule for when the river is dredged?

Answer – Yes, prioritized as high, medium and low and then a schedule is completed.

Question – Is this looked at yearly?

Answer – Hasn't been consistently reviewed.

Question – With the work at Montoya drain increasing, has the water improved at that site?

Answer from John Balliew – E.coli has gone down a little but the salinity has not.

With the questions answered the meeting was open for public comment.

Public Comment:

Mr. Robert Kimpel asked in reference to the project in the Rio Grande at El Paso below the Asarco/University Arroyo, is it going to be a problem?

Carlos Peña and Dr. Padinare Unnikrishna of the IBWC addressed his question by stating that 3 to 15 feet of sediment has been cleared so it will improve. However, there was damage to the American Canal embankment next to the border fence that Customs and Border Protection was responsible for. Customs and Border Protection, the Irrigation District and IBWC are planning to have discussions on this.

Mr. Miguel Teran asked what "Plan B" is if the design doesn't work and Carlos Peña responded that they are still developing a resolution.

There was no further public comment and the meeting was open for suggested topics for the following Citizens Forum meeting.

Suggested Topics:

- Progress of the Canalization Project Certification of Levees and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Engineering Design Results of University/College Arroyo
- Clean Rivers Program water quality monitoring update
- Electronic Calculations of Rio Grande defining elevation notations.
- Presentation in how sediment affects elevation of the river (Two meetings from now)

With the presentations concluded, questions and feedback addressed, meeting open for public comment and suggestions on topics for the following Citizens Forum completed, the meeting was closed at 7:32 PM.

Next meeting will be on July 23, 2015.

*Meeting notes are tentative and summarize in draft the contents and discussion of Citizens Forum Meetings. While these notes are intended to provide a general overview of Citizens Forum Meetings, they may not necessarily be accurate or complete, and may not be representative of USIBWC policy or positions